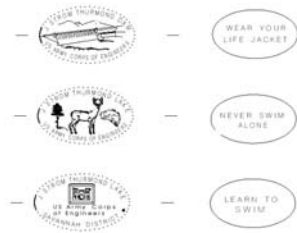


Penny Press Machine

In an effort to encourage water safety and enhance visitation, the US Army Corps of Engineers at J. Strom Thurmond Lake purchased a Penny Press Machine for display/use in the visitor's center and large events. This Thurmond Lake Penny Press Machine is most likely the first of its kind anywhere within the US Army Corps of Engineers. The machine is set to not charge the public for use and offers visitors a chance to press a penny that will have a water safety message on one side, and the US Army Corps of Engineers / Thurmond Lake / Thurmond Dam / Savannah District Corps Logo on the other. Obtaining one out these pressed pennies appears to be a highly popular attraction. Since the purchase of the penny press in February 2005, the total of the individuals pennies run through the Thurmond penny press is estimated to be in excess of \$400 (40,000 water safety contacts.)



2005 Thurmond
Lake Coin Designs



Traditionally, marketing the US Army Corps of Engineers has been a difficult, if not impossible, due to regulations that limit advertising. The penny press concept has neatly dealt with the advertising issues while boosting water safety awareness, Corps project visitation, and Corps partnering opportunities.

Corps projects around the Nation are tasked with water safety information distribution. Typical information has been distributed via paper brochure or Park Ranger presentation. Some items of nominal value, like a Frisbee, have been imprinted with water safety information and then distributed to the public at no charge. Each of these options possesses a drawback. The use of live Rangers requires manpower that is sometimes very scarce. Brochures and free Frisbees have large yearly costs to replenish stocks. It is also of note that brochures often get trashed soon after reaching the hand of the visitor. Procurement of penny press machines for other Corps projects could be a significant and efficient enhancement of the water safety message while increasing visitation quantities, USACOE image, and visitor satisfaction. In order to keep interest levels high, the penny smashing rollers will be changed to new designs each year. The cost of design and supplying new rollers with 3 new fronts and 3 new backs is \$310 plus shipping.

Collecting Elongated Pennies

Pressed pennies are highly collectable. Numerous websites explain the hobby. Ebay.com lists numerous auctions for pressed pennies placed up for bid. These message-bearing pennies will be saved, shown and traded for years to come. Elongated penny enthusiasts claim children collecting the altered pennies make up half of the average collectors. As more USACE penny presses are obtained, the hope is that visitors and potential visitors make efforts to attend locations where limited edition USACE pennies are available.

Yes, Squashing Pennies is Legal!

U.S. Title 18, Chapter 17, Section 331: Prohibits among other things, fraudulent alteration and mutilation of coins. This statute does not, however, prohibit the mutilation of coins if done without fraudulent intent if the mutilated coins are not used fraudulently. The machine purchased by Thurmond Lake has a placard that states the law associated with US currency destruction.

Advantages / Disadvantages

Pressed pennies do have some limitations. There is only a 2"x1" oval of copper to place the message upon. Therefore the message must be short and succinct. The pressed pennies should be viewed by Corps staff as another method, albeit unusual, to augment the messages distributed by live Park Rangers and other more traditional means.

The pressed penny has some distinct advantages over Frisbees, brochures, and live Rangers. Unlike free items such as Frisbees or brochures with a large yearly cost, the purchase of a penny press is purchased once and produces an informative item year after year. The penny press takes very little maintenance and requires a 2'x2' floor space. Also, the pressed pennies are highly collectable and retain value to the visitor long after they have delivered the message once. Each time that penny collection is viewed by the owner, that intended message is reinforced.

Penny Press Machines for Revenue Sharing

Most penny press companies in the United States will not sell their machines. These machines are company owned and will split the machines income with the hosting site. Revenue sharing allows a site to get a machine at no cost and subsequently receive approximately 50% of the fees collected by the machine. Most machines in the US charge \$0.50 plus the penny that gets squashed. The following web sites are from penny press revenue sharing companies:

<http://www.coppermemories.com/>

<http://www.eurolinkdesign.com/>

<http://www.pennymachines.com/>

<http://www.coincrafters.com/index.html>

<http://www.rockyrockholt.com/>

Machines for Purchase

The penny press machine selected by the Thurmond Project was purchased from Coin Crafters in Colorado at a cost of \$2500. This machine is hand operated and can be placed in locations without electricity. Electrical connections sometimes can be scarce at boat show and outdoor events. The machine at Thurmond is currently set to take the visitor's penny, press it, and then return it. Ownership of the machine allows the Thurmond Project the latitude to charge or not charge a fee for the machine use. The following web sites are from penny press companies willing to sell their machines:

<http://www.rockyrockholt.com/>

This company offers limited number of machine types for \$5000 each. Artwork and delivery are included in that price.

<http://www.pennymachines.com/>

This company has a few used machines for sale at \$3500 and up. Art and engraving are extra. This company usually only places machines for revenue share with a host site. They will not sell new machines.

<http://www.coincrafters.com/index.html>

This company offers a full line of electric and hand-crank machines for purchase at less than \$3500. Artwork is included in that price. Delivery is extra. Additional coin dies and display signs can be ordered for \$310. Machine owner can easily change the dies for special occasions. This company will also place machines on revenue share.

Marketing Theory

Some years ago, a company came out with a line of limited edition beanbag toys (Beanie Babies). These cheap toys became desirable due to an ingenious marketing plan to use the potential collectors' word of mouth to do the advertising. Each time a new version of the toy was issued, it was done so as a limited edition from a limited source or location. The general game plan with the pressed penny concept is to model the marketing after the beanbag toy strategy. The collectors and potential collectors build excitement and market the product. After an initial launch, the hope is that these items will become a pop culture attraction for the current and potential Corps project users. Smashed penny collection books like those available at pennycollector.com can be produced exclusively for the Corps agency. These books are produced in bulk (1400 units minimum) for \$1.50-2.00 each and retail for \$5-7.00 each. As penny presses proliferate across the Nation in Corps visitor centers, the collection opportunities will grow and hopefully enhance agency awareness, water safety, and lake visitation. Should the pennies and the collection books be sold, revenue possibilities for cooperative associations can be lucrative. The National Park Service has embraced a similar idea of the National Park Service Passport. The Passport is sold for a profit in NPS stores. Visitors possessing the NPS Passport look to gain a full collection of free stamps in the books. According to NPS officials, this program has increased park visitation Nationwide while increasing souvenir sales too.

Elongated Penny Resources

<http://www.wcmassey.com/lep/hhg/states.htm>

This website tries to keep track of machine locations and is named *Luck "E" Penny's Hitchhiker's Guide to Elongated Coins*

<http://www.pennycollector.com/>

This website has good information on elongated coins.

Elongated Penny Books

http://www.pennycollector.com/store_books.html